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FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2525
INFO RUCNARF/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 2701
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 1614
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 1597
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 000988

SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, EAP/PD,EAP/RSP, DRL; NSC
FOR EPHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/10/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [ID](#) [BM](#) [CE](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: IRREGULAR MIGRANT FLOWS SURGING THROUGH INDONESIA

REF: JAKARTA 884 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The number of irregular migrants transiting Indonesia this year is on pace to quadruple over last year's flow due primarily to a surge of arrivals from Afghanistan. The number of migrants now in Indonesia has reached a peak not seen in nearly a decade. Many of the migrants were on their way to Australia. Despite this surge and the pressures it entails, Indonesians are treating the migrants--including Rohingyas from Burma--well. Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan Embassy has interviewed 55 Sri Lankan asylum seekers, getting access before UNHCR could conduct its own screening. END SUMMARY.

A SURGE IN MIGRANTS

12. (C) Indonesia is experiencing increased migrant flows. A spike in irregular migrants from Afghanistan and a steady flow from other parts of South Asia and the Middle East are filling up the beds of Indonesia's refugee guesthouses and immigration detention centers. During the first five months of 2009 alone, 1,338 irregular migrants streamed into Indonesia, compared with only 385 for all of 2008, UNHCR's Senior Regional Protection Officer Francis Teoh told DepPol/C.

13. (C) Of these, 1,148 came from Afghanistan, another 62 from Iraq, 43 from Sri Lanka, 24 from Iran, and 13 from Somalia. These UNHCR registration figures do not include the 55 Sri Lankans who arrived in Aceh Province in May but do include the 388 Rohingyas and Bangladeshis who washed up in Aceh in January and February.

14. (C) According to Jim O'Callaghan, Regional Director for Southeast Asia Immigration at the Australian Embassy in Jakarta, the numbers of irregular migrants residing in Indonesia are an estimated 2000, the highest since around the year 2000 when Afghans and Iraqis streamed through Indonesia en route to Australia. With the calm sea sailing season of July to November imminent, he expects an even larger inflow later this year. There also has been an increase in Pakistanis, O'Callaghan told DepPol/C.

SMUGGLED IN BY AIR AND SEA

15. (C) The Afghans and Pakistanis are arriving in Indonesia via sophisticated smuggling rings, coming by air and boat, sources said. A source at the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said most are entering Malaysia illegally but are being smuggled into Indonesia by both air (with fake documents) and boat. For example, recently, 15 Afghans

drowned when their boat sank near Sumatra's Riau Province in late April, 22 Afghans were picked up on a bus in North Sumatra in late May, and 65 Afghans and Iraqis traveling together were picked up in East Java on June 4.

¶16. (C) In Indonesia, they are divided up and smuggled to Jakarta where after two months they can get UNHCR asylum certificates, documents that protect them from deportation pending adjudication of their cases, UNHCR's Teoh told us. Some forge the certificates. Indonesian police respect this document, which migrants use as a "get out of jail free card" if picked up on their way to Australia.

¶17. (C) IOM told DepPol/C that it is caring for every irregular migrant referred to it, 1200-1300 now compared to 300 a year ago. Australia is picking up the cost of all those headed to Australia. Australia had allowed IOM to divert some of this funding to care for the 388 Rohingyas/Bangladeshis in Aceh, so \$295,000 in USG PRM funding for this was a major relief, O'Callaghan and IOM told us. The Indonesian National Police and the Australian National Police cooperate closely on interrupting the flow of irregular migrants, in the past year stopping 23 boats with 321 passengers as a result of joint efforts.

TREATED WELL IN INDONESIA

¶18. (C) The migrants are generally treated well in Indonesia. Teoh, in fact, asserted that that Indonesians are "almost too nice," not deporting irregular migrants who have no claim to protection status. A few return voluntarily but most will

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not. Part of this is cultural, not wanting to force the migrants to return home and being very concerned about their human rights, but this is mostly because Indonesian Immigration has a zero budget to deport immigrants. Australia is funding all voluntary repatriations but will not fund deportations from Indonesia.

¶19. (C) IOM Indonesia is taking care of many failed asylum seekers already rejected by UNHCR three times, a few for as long as seven years. Because of the surge in numbers and concern that this could be a pull factor, Indonesia recently began keeping migrants in immigration detention centers rather than letting them move about freely in community settings, IOM explained. Detentions centers are now overflowing, IOM said.

¶10. (C) The GOI, meanwhile, has an icy relationship with UNHCR. Desra Percaya, Director for International Disarmament and Security at the Foreign Affairs Department, told DepPol/C that UNHCR does "nothing" to resettle refugees elsewhere, which is the cause of the problem. That is why the GOI is now keeping migrants under detention, to force UNHCR to resettle refugees. However, UNHCR explained that it is processing the refugees and resettling them as quickly as possible, limited by how quickly third countries are willing to take refugees.

SRI LANKAN EMBASSY GETS ACCESS

¶11. (C) Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan Embassy has interviewed the 55 Sri Lankans (all of Tamil ethnicity) who landed in Aceh on May 14, IOM told us. The Sri Lankan Embassy had told us last month that it had concerns that some of the migrants might have Tamil Tiger links, but has not briefed us re the results of its interviews. The Sri Lankan migrants had refused to be interviewed so were forced by police to meet with the Sri Lankan officials, IOM and UNHCR confirmed. Both IOM and UNHCR were upset that the Sri Lankan Embassy was given access before UNHCR could screen the Sri Lankans. UNHCR has been granted access but has not yet been given permission to go to the camp.

NORTH